DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 974 CG 020 506

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TITLE Stability in University Student Help Source Preferences by Gender over a 10-Year Period. Research Report #8-87.
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cohort Analysis; *College Freshmen; Comparative Analysis; *Helping Relationship; Higher Education; *Problem Solving; *Sex Differences; *Significant Others; *Student Attitudes; Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

Given the importance of assessing stability of university student help source preferences and the lack of such information in the literature, an investigation of help source preferences over a 10-year period was conducted. A help source questionnaire was administered to 118 incoming university freshmen in 1976 and to 462 incoming freshmen in 1986. Students were instructed to assume they had tried unsuccessfully to solve a problem alone and were about to seek help. The questionnaire listed 12 help givers and asked students to rank them, in order of preference, first for an educational/vocational problem and then for an emotional/social problem. Help giver choices were: faculty member, faculty advisor, parents, relatives, male counselor, female counselor, older friend, student friend, nonstudent friend, psychiatrist, physician, and clergyman. Data were analyzed by the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance. The results revealed that help source preferences remained relatively stable over time. Compared to males in the 1986 sample, males in the 1976 sample ranked clergy higher for educational/vocational problems, physicians and clergy higher for emotional/social problems, and nonstudent friend lower. No significant changes in help sources were demonstrated for females between 1976 and 1986 samples. Clear gender differences in help source preference were found for emotional/social problems in both 1976 and 1986. (NB)

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# STABILITY IN UNIVERSITY STUDENT HELP SOURCE PREFERENCES BY GENDER OVER A 10-YEAR PERIOD

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Rose M. Abler and William E. Sedlacek

The stability of university student help source preferences was investigated over a 10-year period. Given the conflicting literature on gender differences in help source preferences, this variable was included in the analysis. A help sources questionnaire (Christenson & Magoon, 1974) was administered to 118 incoming freshmen (44% males; 56% females) in 1976 and 462 incoming freshmen (39% males; 51% females) in 1986. Data were analyzed by the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance (Kruskal & Wallis, 1952). Results revealed that help sources were consistent over this ten year period. Gender differences existed in 1976 as well as in 1986.

# Stability in University Student Help Source Preferences by Gender Over a 10 Year Period

One of the major forces confronting student affairs professionals today is the "intense scrutiny" of programs and services due to the tight budget situation (Shaffer, 1984, p. 112). No longer can costly programs be implemented to fulfill temporary needs or passing trends.

To assist student affairs professionals in planning cost-effective programs, researchers have employed various methods to study student needs -- for example, identifying characteristics of those who utilize counseling services (Sladen, 1982); examining perceptions of the counseling center by those who do and do not use its services (Shueman & Medvene, 1981); and classifying counseling center clients on Clark-Trow subcultures (Sedlacek, Walters, & Valente, 1985). Studying student preferences for sources of help has also provided information to guide the planning of student services (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986). Although such preferences have been studied for over three decades (e.g., Form, 1953; Rust & Davie, 1961; Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Tinsley, Brown, de St. Aubin & Lucek, 1984), little is known about the stability of those choices students indicate. Comparing cross-sectional data from various studies can be problematic due to differences in methodology. Yet if such preferences for help sources are to be used in developing student

programs, it is important to assess the consistency of those preferences. The importance of information provided by help source preferences would vary considerably, depending on whether such preferences indicate temporary interests or enduring needs.

There has been continued debate in the literature as to which variables are a function of help-seeking behavior. Research on gender differences in help preferences has generated particularly equivocal data. Some studies have shown no gender differences (Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Snyder, Hill & Derksen, 1972) whereas others have demonstrated clear gender effects (Cook et al., 1984; Kramer, Berger & Miller, 1974; Pliner & Brown, 1985; Tracey et al., 1984).

Given the importance of assessing stability in student help source preferences and the lack of such information in the current literature, an investigation of help source preferences over time was conducted. By controling the setting, it was believed that a better assessment of whether students had changed over time was possible.

## Method

A help sources questionnaire (Christensen & Magoon, 1974) was administered to 118 incoming freshmen (44% males; 56% females) in 1976. The same questionnaire was administered to 462 incoming freshmen (49% males; 51% females) in 1986. Students were instructed to assume they

had tried unsuccessfully to solve a problem alone and were about to seek help. The help sources questionnaire lists 12 help givers and asks students to rank them, in order of preference, first for an educational/vocational problem and then for an emotional/social problem. Demographic information and questions about past counseling experience were also part of the questionnaire.

## Results

Data were analyzed by the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance for independent samples (Kruskal & Wallis, 1952) at the .05 level. Students were classified on the basis of their year and gender, and their rankings were compared for each type of problem (educational/vocational and emotional/social). When ties (in student rankings) were encountered, one of the items in the tie was randomly selected to be incremented by one.

Table 1 shows the help source rankings of 1976 and 1986 students for educational/vocational and emotional/social problems.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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### Gender Differences

1976. In 1976, males and females reported very similar help source rankings for educational/vocational problems; the only significant difference pertained to preference for a

female counselor. Not surprisingly, female students ranked this help source higher than did male students ($H$ = 8.31). More gender differences were demonstrated for emotional/socia problems. Male students ranked faculty member ($H$ = 4.94), male counselor ($H$ = 15.07), and clergy ($H$ = 3.84) higher than did female students. Female students ranked female counselor ($H$ = 3.88), older friend ($H$ = 4.10), and nonstudent friend ($H$ = 7.26) higher than did male students.

1986. A somewhat similar pattern was demonstrated by 1986 students. For educational/vocational problems, male students ranked male counselor, ($H$ = 8.96) and physician ($H$ = 14.33) higher than did female students. Female students ranked female counselor ($H$ = 12.23) higher than did male students. Again larger gender differences were demonstrated for emotional/social concerns. Male students ranked faculty member ($H$ = 28.21), faculty advisor ($H$ = 5.13), and male counselor ($H$ = 18.81) higher than did female students. Female students ranked female counselor ($H$ = 10.88) and student friend ($H$ = 6.98) higher than did male students.

Changes in Help Source Rankings Between 1976 and 1986

Given that gender differences existed in both 1976 and 1986, particularly for emotional/social problems, gender was not collapsed across year for analyses conducted to determin stability in help source preferences over time. 1976 males were compared to 1986 males, and 1976 females were compared

to 1986 females.

Males. For educational/vocational problems, the only change indicated for male students was that 1976 males ranked clergy high than did 1986 males ($H$ = 6.91). For emotional/social problems, 1976 males ranked physician ($H$ = 4.81) and clergy ($H$ = 10.29) higher than did 1986 males. 1986 males ranked nonstudent friend ($H$ = 7.51) higher than did 1976 males.

Females. No significant changes in help sources were demonstrated for females between 1976 and 1986. This was true whether the problem was educational/vocational or emotional/social.

## Discussion

The results indicate that preferences for help sources remained relatively stable over time. Given that help source preferences are widely used to design student services (see Leong & Sedlacek, 1986), this information is encouraging in light of the need for cost-effective program planning. If help source preferences indicate that a particular program is needed, justifying the costs involved is much easier since it can be demonstrated that the program will be effective on a long term basis.

It is also interesting to note the clear gender differences in help source preferences for emotional/social problems in both 1976 and 1986. For example, preference for a female counselor was more apparent in both groups of female

students. Also, for emotional/social problems, male students were more likely to turn to a member of the campus community than were female students; female counselor was the only campus representative ranked significantly higher for females than males. Outreach groups aimed at helping female students adjust to campus life may more effectively meet their goal by using female counselors as leaders.

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Table 1

Help Source Rankings for Educational/Vocational and Emotional/ Social Problems by Sex and Year

| | Educational/Vocational | | | | Emotional/Social | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| Source | 1976 | 1986 | 1976 | 1986 | 1976 | 1986 | 1976 | 1986 |
| Faculty Member | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 9 |
| Mean Rank | 5.21 | 5.16 | 5.55 | 5.58 | 7.84 | 7.35 | 8.90 | 8.60 |
| S.D. | 2.49 | 2.72 | 2.66 | 2.53 | 2.73 | 2.56 | 2.23 | 2.19 |
| Faculty Advisor | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 8 |
| Mean Rank | 4.71 | 4.96 | 4.80 | 4.59 | 7.63 | 7.46 | 8.00 | 8.07 |
| S.D. | 2.64 | 2.91 | 2.80 | 2.49 | 2.42 | 2.44 | 2.23 | 2.05 |
| Parents | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Mean Rank | 3.72 | 3.44 | 3.20 | 3.20 | 4.02 | 4.05 | 3.78 | 3.79 |
| S.D. | 2.64 | 2.82 | 2.41 | 2.62 | 3.26 | 3.15 | 2.60 | 2.91 |
| Relative | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 8 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Mean Rank | 6.64 | 6.36 | 6.89 | 6.33 | 6.54 | 6.03 | 6.05 | 5.77 |
| S.D. | 2.91 | 2.95 | 3.01 | 2.82 | 3.45 | 2.96 | 3.00 | 2.89 |
| Male Counselor | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 3 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 7 |
| Mean Rank | 4.60 | 5.13 | 5.52 | 5.85 | 5.12 | 5.68 | 6.92 | 6.70 |
| S.D. | 2.52 | 2.45 | 2.53 | 2.42 | 2.41 | 2.38 | 2.40 | 2.16 |
| Female Counselor | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 7 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 5 |
| Mean Rank | 6.00 | 5.87 | 4.53 | 5.05 | 6.47 | 6.38 | 5.52 | 5.62 |
| S.D. | 2.74 | 2.41 | 2.31 | 2.32 | 2.54 | 2.49 | 2.54 | 2.14 |
| Older Friend | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Mean Rank | 4.75 | 4.67 | 4.85 | 4.63 | 4.35 | 3.68 | 3.31 | 3.1 |
| S.D. | 2.24 | 2.50 | 2.22 | 2.49 | 2.63 | 2.38 | 1.90 | 1.7 |

Table 1 (continued)

| | Educational/Vocational | | | | Emotional/Social | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | | Females | | Males | | Females | |
| | 1976 | 1986 | 1976 | 1986 | 1976 | 1986 | 1976 | 1986 |
| **Student Friend** | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Mean Rank | 4.23 | 4.24 | 4.39 | 4.33 | 3.94 | 3.40 | 3.24 | 2.27 |
| S.D. | 3.05 | 2.37 | 2.74 | 2.50 | 3.12 | 2.50 | 2.54 | 1.91 |
| **Nonstudent Friend** | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Mean Rank | 6.65 | 6.32 | 7.00 | 6.42 | 6.13 | 4.82 | 4.49 | 4.27 |
| S.D. | 3.05 | 2.76 | 2.35 | 2.82 | 3.22 | 3.02 | 2.35 | 2.57 |
| **Psychiatrist** | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 12 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| Mean Rank | 10.43 | 10.29 | 10.51 | 10.35 | 8.45 | 8.77 | 8.71 | 9.0 |
| S.D. | 1.98 | 1.84 | 1.26 | 1.49 | 3.64 | 3.11 | 3.11 | 2.4 |
| **Physician** | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 11 | 10 | 12 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 11 | 11 |
| Mean Rank | 10.31 | 10.24 | 10.54 | 10.77 | 8.92 | 9.97 | 9.33 | 9.8 |
| S.D. | 1.36 | 1.55 | 1.79 | 1.09 | 2.98 | 2.21 | 2.77 | 2.1 |
| **Clergyman** | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | 10 | 12 | 10 | 12 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 12 |
| Mean Rank | 10.15 | 10.65 | 10.12 | 10.78 | 8.15 | 9.92 | 9.39 | 10.2 |
| S.D. | 1.85 | 2.05 | 2.71 | 1.81 | 3.80 | 2.77 | 3.08 | 2.4 |